

Reality of faculty crunch in India

The higher education sector has witnessed tremendous growth since independence. It boasts of 44 Central Universities, 298 State Universities, 148 State Private Universities, 130 Deemed Universities and 82 MHRD-funded technical institutions, including IITs, IIMs, IISERs, etc. It is said that India's higher education sector is working with only half of the teacher strength it actually needs. Faced with quality faculty crunch in educational institutions, the Government has set up several task forces and committees to study the problem and suggest a way out to make appropriate recommendations for its alleviation, but nothing has been achieved so far. In many convocation addresses of various educational bodies, our President has raised this issue and stressed upon filling these posts at the earliest. India has a population of 1.27 billion, and it is ridiculous to say that there is a cute shortage of quality faculty. Following are some of the hardcore realities for shortage of quality faculty.

Teaching an unattractive profession: In India, since the last 15–20 years, interest in the teaching profession is declining; it is not the first career choice of students. Due to good pay and perks, our best talent is attracted towards MNCs and other private sector jobs, while the next choice is joining Government civil services. The remaining students generally join the teaching profession. If we conduct a survey at the level of Assistant Professor, we will find that they mostly joined this profession by chance and not by choice. To make this profession more attractive, we have to start Indian Education Service (IES) on par with other central services like IAS, IFS and IPS, for which selection should be done by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). In many States of India, there is State Education Service to select Assistant Professors through their respective Public Service Commission.

Ineffective system of evaluation: The Government of India, through its notification dated 22 July 1988 entrusted the task of conducting the eligibility test for lectureship to UGC. The National Eligibility Test (NET) is conducted by UGC in humanities and social sciences to determine eligibility for lectureship and for award of JRF in order to ensure mini-

mum standards for the entrants in the teaching profession and research. The purpose for which the UGC-NET exam was started has lost its relevance and value now. From June 2012 onwards, due to change in its format this exam has failed in assessing the teaching and research ability of candidates. Because of no negative marking and objective mode in the third paper, most postgraduate students tried their luck in this exam. In this exam alone, more than 60,000 students qualified and most of them neither have knowledge of research technique nor teaching methods.

Contractual appointments: In the 'UGC regulations for higher education 2010' it is clearly mentioned that the teachers should be appointed on contract basis only when it is absolutely necessary, i.e. in case the student-teacher ratio does not satisfy the laid down norms, and the fixed emoluments paid to such contract teachers should not be less than the monthly gross salary of a regularly appointed Assistant Professor. Such appointments should not be made initially for more than one academic session. However, since the last few years a trend has started in the teaching profession to appoint contractual staff where there is no standardized pay. There are thousands of contractual teachers those are working in different universities with the hope of regularization of their appointments. If a teacher does not get job surety, how can he/she teach students with full intellectual potential and calibre. Appointment of contractual teaching staff has also led to a new breed of corruption in this profession. The obvious motive is to place unfairly the contract appointees for regular selection and it is obvious that vested interests are involved.

Manipulation in the interview: Nepotism and manipulation are rising in this profession day by day, which is one of the important factors for the shortage of quality faculty. It has been observed that non-meritorious, mediocre and predetermined candidates are entering the profession through unfair means. In most cases, subject experts do not give their frank opinion on the performance and domain knowledge of the candidates. They merely attend the interview to fulfil the quorum. Chairpersons dominate the

interview board. Fresh appointments at the level of Assistant Professor are not transparent, especially in autonomous bodies. Due to lack of standard guidelines for screening, stronger candidates are screened out deliberately to make way for pre-determined candidates. For example, at the entry level for Assistant Professor, essential qualification is post-graduation and UGC-NET. When the number of candidates applying for the post is large, screening is carried out keeping in mind the qualification of the favourite candidate. There are no standard criteria fixed by UGC regarding the number of candidates to be called against each post. A new practice has been started in this profession which declares the interview result as 'NFS', i.e. 'None Found Suitable'. Such cases have been seen in many interviews where there is no favourable candidate of the chairperson of the interview board. There are no defined criteria of suitability. It is just a matter of interpretation.

Time bound recruitment process: There should be a time-bound recruitment process of 3–6 months for all teaching posts. It has been noted that if personal interests are involved, then recruitment process is completed within a month; otherwise, it takes more than a year and in some cases it has also been seen that institutions advertise the posts again and again till their favourite person is selected. In India, there is no agency to audit to find out how many times the institution has advertised the post, how much money has been spent on these advertisements, and whether the posts are filled up or not. In the garb of autonomy, the heads of these institutions are wasting valuable tax-payers money. It has also been seen that when any teacher retires, there is no seriousness to fill the vacancy at the earliest. If appointment on many prominent posts (like CJI, CVC, CIC, CEC, Cabinet Secretary, etc.) can be done well in advance before the person retires, then why not for teachers.

Anomalies in government rules: The newly established universities are facing a crisis in attracting quality faculty at the level of Associate Professor and Professor. Despite the advantage of 65 years of retirement age, the faculty members are not willing to move from their present

place to new universities. The biggest barrier in attracting faculty to the new institutions is the ban on portability of pension despite the DOPT clarification of 2005 and 2009, which provides pension benefit for the employees covered under GPF-cum-Pension Rules of 1972, even if they change their organization. But, the faculty members joining the new Central Universities and institutions like IITs, IIMs and IISERs are being denied the benefit on the ground that these institutions were not in existence as on 31 December 2003. Further, the Cabinet decision that faculty members in the new institutions may be taken on deputation for a period of up to 10 years and during the period of deputation, these institutions may contribute their leave salary and pension contribution to their parent organization, is not helping the new Central Universities in attracting quality faculty because the rule of giving 10 years

of deputation to their teachers has not been adopted by many universities and institutions.

Brain drain within India: Earlier it was said that there was brain drain from India due to better job prospects. Now it has been started within India. It has been seen that due to the autocratic and arrogant nature of the heads of various Government institutions, many excellent faculty members are resigning from these institutions to join private universities because they have academic freedom there and also get better perks.

Location of the new institutions: Many newly established universities and institutions have been set up in remote areas keeping in mind the overall development of that area. But in reality, talented people do not want to work in these areas due to lack of basic facilities like transportation, education of their wards, medical facilities, etc. Also, those who

joined there at the level of say, Assistant Professor, would want to settle down in the bigger metros after working for a short period.

The main reason for the degrading quality of teaching and research in our universities is the poor quality of teachers. However, in many institutions, the dearth of new faculty is an outcome of a non-serious and dismissive attitude of the authorities themselves. It is time to rectify our recruitment process before it is too late to get qualified teachers. Otherwise, how we can get a place in the world global rankings.

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Is terrific curriculum vitae congruent to being a good scientist?

At the age of 32 Dr X, Ph D, appeared to have it all, enthusiasm, passion and confident brashness. Five years before, he had given up a comfortable yet unpredictable and somewhat challenging post-doctoral position abroad to become a senior scientist in a research institution in India, proposing to bring in firing new ideas, papers for the research institute and to take the academic world by storm.

The decision to switch jobs was not easy for Dr X, but his growing need for a stable life and a chance to make it big made him take the decision. Remarkably, everything had gone according to the plan, but why was this creative genius failing gradually then?

Today approximately, hundreds of Indian postdocs all over the world with the best of curriculum vitae (CVs) in hand come back to their homeland for good. Their publications in the most reputed journals fetch them the best possible positions in India. With a good credit history in terms of publications, experience and position in hand, what actually holds them back from making it big in India is a mystery? The reason may be the following.

Nowadays science is done in teams. Therefore, many functional laboratories abroad are doing cutting-edge science

and producing good papers, but with the contribution of the group as a whole rather than any individual. These papers no doubt add to the CVs of the postdocs, but this does not make them good scientists.

Authorities hiring such postdocs in India for R&D positions get carried away by the brilliant CVs and the presentations made by them of the work done in foreign laboratories. However, after acquiring positions in India, these postdocs are unable to do good work and produce excellent publications as independent investigators. Information about Indian researchers/scientists and who have published in top journals while working and staying in the country and not because of a mere carry over of their tenure-track or postdoctoral work abroad, supports the above findings. The scenario in India reveals that postdocs with good CVs are not preferred for higher positions in the industry compared to postgraduates or even graduates from the country. This is because though positions in the industry are no doubt lucrative, the research is mostly product-oriented and delivery is of paramount importance. In contrast, research in academia is much more open and independent. However, the problem surfaces because we joyfully embrace

publication bias. Novel and eye-catching science is the only virtue that is applauded. Promotion policies call for early and immediate action if one publishes in any of the top journals. Hence many scientists are eager to publish in such journals to get quick promotions. The increasing number of papers that are retracted from top journals raises questions about such policies.

Therefore, if CVs help in short-listing candidates for positions, interviewing should entail basis of experiments, that did not produce expected results for the theory that was conceptualized, and failed the postdoc's theory or hypothesis. This would encourage students pursuing their Ph Ds at present in understanding that knowledge in science is more important than acquiring research papers for the sake of good CVs. Thus, there is a need to redefine postdoctoral recruitments, especially for high-level positions in academia.

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